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# LONDON VISIONS





# LONDON VISIONS

BY

LAURENCE BINYON

COLLECTED AND  
AUGMENTED



LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

1908

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## PREFACE

THESE poems have been collected from two little volumes published under the same title in 1895 and 1898; from a volume of poems printed by Mr. Daniel at Oxford in 1895, and from "Porphyryion and other Poems," published in 1898. To these are added a certain number of unpublished pieces, more recently written.

Little satisfied as I am with the verse which forms this collection, composed at various times, and some of it now a long while ago, I have thought it better to leave it as it was written, save for a few corrections and omissions. I should wish that the whole, now rearranged, should be regarded as a single corporate poem, and no one piece apart from the rest. Some, I feel, are too insignificant to stand alone, yet add perhaps some slight touch to an aggregate effect.

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# LONDON VISIONS

## I

### RED NIGHT

ROLLED in a smouldering mist, wrapt in an ardent  
cloud,

Over ridged roofs, over the buried roar  
That comes and goes

Where shadowy London mutters at the core  
Of meeting streets interminably ploughed  
Through blackness built and steepled and im-  
mense

With felt, unfeatured, waste magnificence,  
The night shudders and glows.

Ensanguined skies, that lower and lift and change  
Each instant! sullen with a spectral rose  
Upon the towered horizon; but more near  
A lurid vapour, throbbing up the gloom,  
Glares like a furnace fume;

Exhausted pallors hover faint and strange;  
Dull fiery flushes melt and reappear;

While over all in lofty glimpses far  
Spaces of silence and blue dream disclose  
The still eye of a star.

## RED NIGHT

Muffled in burning air, so dumb  
Above this monstrous ever-trembling hum,  
What hide you, heavens? What sombre presences,  
What powers pass over? What dim-legioned host,  
What peopled pageantries,  
With gleam of arms and robes that crimsoned trail,  
In silent triumph or huge mockery hail?  
O, is it the tumultuous-memored ghost  
Of some lost city, fabulous and frail,  
Stoops over London; Susa, Thebes, or Tyre,  
Rebuilt out of mist and fire?  
No, rather to its secret self revealed  
The soul of London burning in the skies  
Her desolations and her majesties!

There, there is all unsealed:  
Terror and hope, ecstasy and despair  
Their apparition yield,  
While still through kindled street and shadowy  
square  
The faces pass, the uncounted faces crowd,—  
Rages, lamentings, joys, in masks of flesh concealed.

Down a grimed lane, around a bare-benched room,  
Seven shapes of men are sunken, heads upon hands  
bowed.  
—O spent and mad desires, lost in the fiery cloud,  
What dungeon fled you from?  
Across the river's glittering gloom,  
Under the towered chimes, a youth steps, bright

## RED NIGHT

With dream that all the future clothes,  
Into this new, enchanted land.  
Incessant stream the faces into light!  
From his wife's hand  
Behold a drunkard snatch the toil-earned pence,  
And strike her on the patient face with oaths.  
But over trees, upon a balcony,  
To a young girl life murmurs up immense  
Its strange delight,  
And in her pulses to her spirit sings.  
Along an alley thronged and flaring  
A woman's loud self-loathing laughter rings.  
The old prowler leers. Fierce cries a mob incense.  
(Still the red Night her stormy heart is baring.)  
A bent blind beggar taps along the stones.  
The indifferent traffic roars and drones.  
Blank under a high torch  
Gapes a house-ruin, propped with beams; beneath  
Some shadow-guarded and neglected porch  
A girl and boy  
(Whence flowered, O Night, yon soft and fearful  
    rose?)  
Press timid lips and breathe,  
Speechless, their joy.  
Hither and thither goes  
The homeless outcast; students turn the page  
By lamplight; the physician sentences;  
Dull-eyed or jovial, tavern-loungers drink;  
The applauded actor steps upon the stage;  
Mothers with far thoughts watch upon their knees

## RED NIGHT

Where children slumber; revellers stamp and  
shout;  
Long-parted bosoms meet in sobbed embrace;  
Hope, behind doors, ebbs from the waiting face;  
Locked bodies sway and swell  
With pain of unendurable farewell:  
No instant, but some debt of terror's paid,  
Some shame exacted, measureless love poured out,  
Weak hearts are helped, strong men are torn,  
Wild sorrow in dear arms is comforted,  
The last peace dawns upon the newly dead,  
And in hushed rooms is heard wail of the newly  
born.

What ferments rise and mingle,  
Night, on your cloudy mirror! what young fire  
Shoots, and what endless lassitudes expire!  
Yet out of one flesh wrought,  
None separate, none single!  
Hater and hated, seeker and sought,  
O restless, O innumerable shapes,  
Kneaded by one all-urging thought,  
That none diverts, that none escapes;  
So thirsted for, if not in pride, in shame,  
If not with tenderness, with railing curse,  
If not with hands that cherish, hands that maim,  
Life, how vast! Life, how brief!  
Eternally wooed and wooing,  
That some would stifle, and some hotly seize,  
And some by cunning trap into their mesh,



## RED NIGHT

Or plunder in the darkness like a thief;  
And these from rapturous pangs of flesh  
Would crush to maddening wine, and these  
In still renunciation lure to their soul's ease.  
Though never in a single heart contained,  
Though depth of it no wisest seer may plumb,  
Though height of it no hero wholly gained,  
Heavenly and human, twined in all our throes  
Of passion that in blind heat overflows  
To charge the night with thick and shuddering  
fume,  
And felt in every cry, in every deed  
Defaced or freed,  
Ah, spent at such a dear and cruel cost,—  
Possessed a moment, and then, like yon height  
Of stars, clouded in our own selves and lost,—  
Lives the supreme  
Reality, diviner than all dream.

Now all the heaven like a huge smithy glows,  
Hollow and palpitating dusk and glare!  
Ah, forge of God, where blows  
The blast of an incredible flame, what might  
Shapes to what uses there  
Each obdurate iron or molten fiery part  
Of the one infinite wrought human heart,  
In tears, love, anger, beauty and despair  
Throbbing for ever, under the red night?

## II

### THE LITTLE DANCERS

LONELY, save for a few faint stars, the sky  
Dreams; and lonely, below, the little street  
Into its gloom retires, secluded and shy.  
Scarcely the dumb roar enters this soft retreat;  
And all is dark, save where come flooding rays  
From a tavernwindow; there, to the brisk measure  
Of an organ that down in an alley merrily plays,  
Two children, all alone and no one by,  
Holding their tattered frocks, through an airy  
    maze  
Of motion, lightly threaded with nimble feet,  
Dance sedately: face to face they gaze,  
Their eyes shining, grave with a perfect pleasure.

### III

## FEBRUARY TWILIGHT

O WEARINESS, that writest histories  
On all these human faces, and O Sighs  
That somewhere silence hears! You have no part,  
It seems, in the old earth's deep-flowering heart;  
Your way of solace is a different way.

A colour comes upon the end of day.  
At this street-corner, budded branches bare  
Trace springing lines upon the tender air;  
But over the far misty flush one's eye  
Lights at an apparition: lo, on high  
The little moon! as if she came all fresh  
Into this world, where our brief blood and flesh  
Is weary of burdens. She has seen all earth's  
Most mighty races in their ends and births,  
And all the glory and sorrow wrought and sung  
Since lips found language; and to-night is young.

## IV

### THE STATUES

TARRY a moment, happy feet,  
That to the sound of laughter glide!  
O glad ones of the evening street,  
Behold what forms are at your side!

You conquerors of the toilsome day  
Pass by with laughter, labour done;  
But these within their durance stay;  
Their travail sleeps not with the sun.

They, like dim statues without end,  
Their patient attitudes maintain;  
Your triumphing bright course attend,  
But from your eager ways abstain.

Now, if you chafe in secret thought,  
A moment turn from light distress,  
And see how Fate on these hath wrought,  
Who yet so deeply acquiesce.

Behold them, stricken, silent, weak,  
The maimed, the mute, the halt, the blind,  
Condemned amid defeat to seek  
The thing which they shall never find.

## THE STATUES

They haunt the shadows of your ways  
In masks of perishable mould:  
Their souls a changing flesh arrays,  
But they are changeless from of old.

Their lips repeat an empty call,  
But silence wraps their thoughts around.  
On them, like snow, the ages fall;  
Time muffles all this transient sound.

When Shalmaneser pitched his tent  
By Tigris, and his flag unfurled,  
And forth his summons proudly sent  
Into the new unconquered world;

Or when with spears Cambyses rode  
Through Memphis and her bending slaves,  
Or first the Tyrian gazed abroad  
Upon the bright vast outer waves;

When sages, star-instructed men,  
To the young glory of Babylon  
Foreknew no ending; even then  
Innumerable years had flown,

Since first the chisel in her hand  
Necessity, the sculptor, took,  
And in her spacious meaning planned  
These forms, and that eternal look;

## THE STATUES

These foreheads, moulded from afar,  
These soft, unfathomable eyes,  
Gazing from darkness, like a star;  
These lips, whose grief is to be wise.

As from the mountain marble rude  
The growing statue rises fair,  
She from immortal patience hewed  
The limbs of ever-young despair.

There is no bliss so new and dear,  
It hath not them far-off allured.  
All things that we have yet to fear  
They have already long endured.

Nor is there any sorrow more  
Than hath ere now befallen these,  
Whose gaze is as an opening door  
On wild interminable seas.

O Youth, run fast upon thy feet,  
With full joy haste thee to be filled,  
And out of moments brief and sweet  
Thou shalt a power for ages build.

Does thy heart falter? Here, then, seek  
What strength is in thy kind! With pain  
Immortal bowed, these mortals weak  
Gentle and unsubdued remain.

V

NARCISSUS

By white St. Martin's, where the fountain shone  
And plashed unheard in the busy morning air,  
March, with rippling shadow and sudden sun,  
Laughing riotous round the gusty square,  
From frail narcissus heaped in baskets there  
Blew to me, as I passed, its odour keen,  
Keen and strange, subtle and sweet;  
And lo! all new and green,  
Spring for me had entered the stony street.

## VI

### THE BUILDERS

STAGGERING slowly, and swaying  
Heavily at each slow foot's lift and drag,  
With tense eyes careless of the roar and throng  
That under jut and jag  
Of half-built wall and scaffold stream along,  
Six bowed men straining strong  
Bear, hardly lifted, a huge lintel stone.  
This ignorant thing and prone,  
Mere dumbness, blindly weighing,  
A brute piece of blank death, a bone  
Of the stark mountain, helpless and inert,  
Yet draws each sinew till the hot veins swell  
And sweat-drops upon hand and forehead start,  
Till with short pants the suffering heart  
Throbs to the throat, where fiercely hurt  
Crushed shoulders cannot heave; till thought and  
    sense  
Are nerved and narrowed to one aim intense,  
One effort scarce to be supported longer!  
What tyrant will in man or God were stronger  
To summon, thrall and seize  
The exaction of life's uttermost resource



## THE BUILDERS

That from the down-weighed breast and aching  
    knees  
To arms lifted in pain  
And hands that grapple and strain  
Upsurges, thrusting desperate to repel  
The pressure and the force  
Of this, which neither feels, nor hears, nor sees?

## VII

### THE DESTROYER

HE stands on high in the torch glare,  
With planted feet, with lifted axe.  
Behind, a gulf of crimsoned air;  
Beneath, the old wall that gapes and cracks

Tossed fragments crash to dust and smoke.  
Exulting life, aloft he stands  
And drives his unrepentant stroke,  
Nor heeds the havoc of his hands.

Below, one lingers gazing. Why  
Within his heart does secret joy  
Quivering awaken and reply  
To each home-blow, Destroy, destroy?

Lulled in the casual feast of sense,  
Awed by the ages' fortress-walls,  
Out of its slumber roused, intense,  
To the swung axe a demon calls,—

Man's Demon, never satiate,  
That finds nought made to its desire;  
How shall it to this world be mate,—  
To a world of stone, a heart of fire!

## VIII

### THE GOLDEN GALLERY AT SAINT PAUL'S

THE Golden Gallery lifts its aery crown  
O'er dome and pinnacle: there I leaned and  
gazed.

Is this indeed my own familiar town,  
This busy dream? Beneath me spreading hazed  
In distance large it lay, nor nothing broke  
Its mapped immensity. Golden and iron-brown,  
The stagnant smoke  
Hung coiling above dense roofs and steeples dim.  
The river, a serpent pale, my wandering eye  
Lightened; but houses pressed to his silver brim.  
With charging clouds the sky  
Broad shadows threw. And now in a sudden  
shower

A veil sweeps toward me; violent drops fall hard:  
Then softly the sun returns on chimney and tower,  
And the river flashes, barred  
With shadowy arches; warm the wet roofs shine,  
And the city is stricken with light from clouds  
aglow,

Uplifting in dazzling line  
O'er valleys of ashy blue, their wrinkled snow.

## THE GOLDEN GALLERY

I leaned and gazed: but into my gazing eyes  
Entered a sharp desire, a strange distress.  
East I looked, where the foreign masts arise  
In rough sea-breathing reaches of broad access;  
And North to the hills, and South to the golden  
    haze,  
But nowhere found satisfaction more.  
Beneath me, the populous ways  
Muttered; but idly vast their troubled roar  
Went up; I heard no longer: before me rose  
Pale as, at morning, mist from autumn streams,  
The longing of men made visible, helpless woes,  
Fountains of love wasted, and trampled dreams.  
Escaped from hearts of youth, or aged brain,  
Hither they floated, hither fled.  
Then thou, O city of strife, mother of pain,  
Faded'st; and out of the mist a new city  
I built in dream, the stones of it raised with tears,  
And founded deep in hearts that have richly bled;  
But watched, through mightier years,  
By towers of faith, and girdled with walls of pity.

## IX

### THE DRAY

HUGE through the darkened street  
The Dray comes, rolling an uneven thunder  
Of wheels and trampling feet;  
The shaken windows stare in sleepy wonder.

Now through an open space,  
Where loitering groups about the tavern's fume  
Show many a sullen face  
And brawling figure in the lighted gloom,

It moves, a shadowy force  
Through misery triumphant: flushed, on high  
Guiding his easy course,  
A giant sits, with indolent soft eye.

He turns not, that dim crowd  
Of listless forms beneath him to behold;  
Shawled women with head bowed  
Flitting in hasty stealth, and children old:

Calm as some conqueror  
Rode through old Rome, nor heeded at his heel,  
'Mid the proud spoils of war,  
What woeful captives thronged his chariot wheel.

X

THE RAG-PICKER

IN the April sun  
Shuffling, shapeless, bent,  
Cobweb-eyed, with stick  
Searching, one by one,  
Gutter-heaps, intent  
Wretched rags to pick.

O, is this a man?—  
Man, whose spirit erect  
Trampling circumstance,  
Death and evil, can  
Measure worlds, nor checked  
By fell time and chance,

With undaunted eye,  
With a mouth of song,  
Front the starry blue?—  
(O you passers-by,  
Moving swift and strong,  
Answer, what seek you?)

Husk of manhood, mere  
Shrivel of his kind!—  
In a bloodless mask

## THE RAG-PICKER

How the old eyes peer,  
With no light behind!—  
Mate of his mean task;

Yet this wreckage fill  
With a thought, possess  
With a faith's empire,  
It shall be a will  
Mightier than the seas,  
Man, more dread than fire!

## XI

### A WOMAN

O THOU that facing the mirror darkly bright  
In the shadowed corner, loiterest shyly fond,  
To ask of thine own sad eyes a comfort slight,  
Before thou brave the pathless world beyond;

Not first to-night invades thy spirit this wild  
Despair, when loneliness stabs thee! Turned,  
thy face

Trembles, and soft hesitation makes thee a child,  
The child thou wast in some far, forgotten place,

Amid things for ever rejected. Thoughtest thou  
so

From the blankness of life to escape to a region  
enjoyed,

Glowing, and strange? Yet blank to-night, I  
know,

Spreads life, my sister; within thee a deeper void.

In all this city, methinks, so charged with pain,  
None suffers as thou; desiring what thou dost  
With insupportable longing, and still in vain  
Desiring, still accepting what thou must.



## A WOMAN

Where tarrys he, Love, the adored one? In fields  
unknown

Roams he apart, or in sound of a pleasant stream  
Sleeps? Nay, dwells he in cloudy rumour alone,  
A name, a vision, a sweet, eluding dream?

He lives, he lives, my sister; yet rarely to men  
He appears; they touch but his robe, and believe  
it is he.

But soft, with inaudible feet, he is flown, nor  
again

Comes soon; rejoicing still to be wayward and  
free.

A moment, ev'n now, he was near thee: in-  
visible wings

Brushed by thee; and infinite longing, to follow,  
to find

That vision truth, o'ercomes thee,—thy heart's  
sad things

To tell in a trusted ear, on a bosom kind.

Alas! not so he is won: when the last despair  
Encamps in thy heart, at last when all seems  
vain,

Then, perchance, he will steal to thee unaware,  
And loose thy tears, and understand thy pain.

## XII

### THE STORM

STOOPING over London, skies convulsed  
With thunder moved: a rumour of storm remote  
Hushed them, and birds flew troubled. The  
    gradual clouds  
Up from the West climbing, above the East  
Glowed sullen as copper embossed; against their  
    gloom,  
Like ghosts astonished, thronged the steeples  
    white.  
Still with absorbed hurry the streets' uproar  
Ran, shadowed by strange unquiet, as vaguely  
    pursued.  
Lone workers from drear windows looked and  
    sighed.  
Nearer drooped the sky's contracted face;  
The face of a Titan in punishment heavily  
    bowed.  
As painful sweat, the drops fell loud: at last,  
With silent shivering flashes of angry flame,  
Long stifled, his deep thunder burst and groaned.  
Then crawling over, the banks of darkness broke  
And loosened splendour showered its arrows  
    abroad.

## THE STORM

Now, opposite the retreating storm aghast,  
In full-recovered sun, new dazzling clouds,  
Alp beyond Alp, glitter in awful snow.  
Men stop in the street to wonder. The brilliance  
    runs,  
Washing with silent waves the town opprest;  
Startles squalid rooms with a sudden smile;  
Enters gloomy courts, and glories there.  
Strange as a vision the wide expanded heavens  
Open; the living wind with nearness breathes  
On weary faces of women of many cares;  
They stand at their doors and watch with a  
    soothed spirit  
The marvellous West asleep in endless light.

XIII  
THE PARALYTIC

HE stands where the young faces pass and  
throng;  
His blank eyes tremble in the noonday sun:  
He sees all life, the lovely and the strong,  
Before him run.

Eager and swift, or grouped and loitering, they  
Follow their dreams, on busy errands sped,  
Planning delight and triumph; but all day  
He shakes his head.

## XIV

### THE SLEEPERS

As a swallow that sits on the roof,  
I gaze on the world aloof;

In the silence, when men lie sleeping,  
I hear the noise of weeping :

The tears, by Day derided,  
To tender Night confided.

Ah, now I listen, I cannot delay  
In thoughts apart ; I must not stay.

The doors are closed and fast : unseen,  
With stealthy feet I glide between.

I see the sleepers asleep in their beds,  
Negligent arms, motionless heads ;

Beautiful in the bloom of slumber,  
Peaceful armies without number.

## THE SLEEPERS

Not here I linger: the sigh of those  
That sleep not, draws me with answered throes.

A mother mapping her day of cares,  
On her sleeping baby softly stares.

A youth by shameful sorrow torn,  
Thinks on the unendurable morn.

By her husband, a wife unhappy lies,  
With bitter heart and open eyes.

An old man hears the voice of the wave,  
His dear son's cold unquiet grave.

Alone in the lonely, listening night  
A child lies still in dumb affright:

The burden of all dark things unknown  
Weighs on his trembling heart like stone.

A man remembers his dead love's smile,  
And his tranquil courage is quelled awhile.

My heart is heavy with love and pain;  
The tears within me oppress my brain.

What shall I tell you, you that ache  
And number the laggard hours awake?

## THE SLEEPERS

O stabbed and stricken, what soothing art  
Shall I use to assuage the wounds that smart?

The consolation that, ere I knew  
Love and sorrow, I fancied true,

Is faint and helpless, now I find,  
As beauty told in the ears of the blind:

And I cannot tell, if I would, the thought  
That strengthens me most, when my heart is  
wrought,

O brother that cannot the days undo,  
Could I but the reckoning pay for you!

O mother, sink your head in peace,  
And I will your knot of care release.

Dear child, give me your dread to bear:  
I hold your hand, I stroke your hair.

It is I, who love you, that watch and keep  
Darkness from you, the while you sleep.

I have no counsel; I know not why  
In your breasts the arrows burning lie;

I cannot heal your hurts, nor take  
The sharp iron out of souls that ache.

## THE SLEEPERS

O yet, as I watch, the lashes close  
A little, the eyes their lids dispose ;

The hand that fondly lies in mine  
Relaxes; the wearied heads decline.

And now on wings the sorrows flee  
From the happy sleepers, hither to me.

O noiseless sorrows, darkly thronging,  
My heart is prepared : my tender longing

You alone can appease, with tears,  
With pangs, with passion, with shame, with fears.

Feed on my heart that is open and bare,  
Feed your fill, sorrow and care :

Take me, pains of all souls forlorn.  
For O too swiftly arrives the morn.



XV

MAY NIGHT

COME, let us forth, and wander the rich, the  
murmuring night!

The shy, blue dusk of summer trembles above the  
street;

On either side uprising glimmer houses pale:

But me the turbulent babble and voice of crowds  
delight;

For me the wheels make music, the mingled cries  
are sweet;

Motion and laughter call: we hear, we will not  
fail.

For see, in secret vista, with soft, retiring stars,  
With clustered suns, that stare upon the throngs  
below,

With pendent dazzling moons, that cast a noon-  
day white,

The full streets beckon: come, for toil has burst  
his bars,

And idle eyes rejoice, and feet unhasting go.

O let us out and wander the gay and golden  
night.

## XVI

### DEPTFORD

WELL is it, shrouded Sun, thou spar'st no ray  
To illumine this sad street! A light more bare  
Would but discover more this bald array  
Of roofs dejected, window patched that stare  
From sordid walls: for the shy breath of Spring,  
Her cheek of flowers, or fragrance of her hair,  
Thou could'st not, save to cheated memory, bring.

Alas! I welcome this dull mist, that drapes  
The path of the heavy sky above the street,  
Casting a phantom dimness on these shapes  
That pass, by toil disfeatured, with slow feet  
And sad mistrustful eyes; while in the mire  
Children a mockery of play repeat,  
Drearily to satisfy their starved desire.

Yet O, what clouds of heaviness deter  
My spirit; what sad vacancy impedes!  
I am like some far-ventured traveller,  
Whom, in a forest vast, entangled weeds  
Have hindered; over whom green darkness fills  
The inextricable boughs and stifling feeds  
A poisonous fear, that sinks on him and chills.

## DEPTFORD

Nor finds he faith, amid the monstrous trees  
Rooted in silence, peopled with strange cries  
And stealthy shadows (where alone he sees  
Rank growths of the hot marsh, but watching eyes  
Imagines), to believe the self-same bark  
He leans on, lifts to the unclouded skies  
Its crest victorious from that cradle dark.

I with like pain and languor am opprest:  
Me too a forest upon poison fed,  
Me too the marsh and the rank weeds infest.  
Almost I trace in the dumb pall o'erhead  
A net of stubborn boughs that dimly mesh  
The air; I stifle: like a chain of lead  
They weigh upon my soul, they bind my flesh.

I cannot breathe: the last and worst despair  
Begins to invade me, numbing even desire  
That panted for sweet draughts of light and air.  
Dumb walls against me with blind heaven con-  
spire:

Incredible the sun seems now, a ghost  
I dreamed of in my dreams; unreal fire.  
The light is blotted out, the blue is lost.

Was it mirage, the glow I fancied warm  
On human cheeks, the beauty of my kind?  
I feel it fading from me, a brief charm  
Flying at touch. Blow hither, storms of wind!

## DEPTFORD

Strike hither, strong sun, to my dulled heart's core!  
Awake, disturb me, lest mine eyes grow blind,  
By fatal use to a foul dream resigned,  
Accept for Nature's body this, her sore.

## XVII

### THE BATHERS

Hither, from thirsty day  
And stifling labour and the street's hot glare,  
To twilight shut away  
Beyond the soft roar, under hovering trees,  
Hither the gleeful multitudes repair,  
And by the open, echoing, evening shore,  
On the dim grass, to the faint freshened breeze,  
With laughter their delighted bodies bare.

Peaceful above the sunset's burning smoke,  
One star and white moon lure the eastern night.  
Already tasting of that wished delight  
The great elms stir their boughs,  
As from the day's hot languor they awoke.  
But the gliding cool of water whispering calls  
The bathers, in soft-plunging falls,  
To overtake its ripple with swift stroke,  
Or, pillowing their upward faces, drowse  
On undulation of an easy peace ;  
Miraculous release  
Of heavy spirits, laving all desire  
With satisfaction and with joy entire.

## THE BATHERS

Strange now the factory's humming wheel, the cry  
Of tireless engines, the swift-hoisted bales  
Unnumbered; strange the smell of ordered wares  
In the shop's dimness: noonday traffic fails  
Out of the wave-washed ear; stiff office stool,  
And busy hush: and like a turbid dream,  
The tavern's glittering fume insensibly  
Ebbs with the hot race and the gluttoned stream  
Of labour, thieving the dear sands of youth.  
But ever closer, like sweet-tasting truth,  
The vivid drench, the yielding pressure cool;  
And like a known touch comes the fitful breeze  
From murmuring silence: the suspended trees  
Above, the wet drops that from hair and beard  
Run down the rippled back, are real and sweet.  
Warm are the breathing limbs, and the firm feet  
Tread lightly the firm ground, or lightly race  
To mirthful cries: while Evening, nearer heard  
And felt, a presence of invisible things  
Inbreathes, as to the nostril keen she brings  
The darkling scented freshness of the grass.

O now from raiment of illusion shed  
The perfect body moves, rejecting care,  
And to mysterious liberty remits  
The rejoicing mind, in native pasture fed;  
And mates its glory with the priceless air,  
The universal beam, whatever fits  
Untamable spirits, nor is bought nor sold;  
Equalled with heroes old,

## THE BATHERS

That beautifully people the green morn  
Of time, and from pale marble, young and wise  
Gaze past our hurrying world, our triumphs worn,  
And our hearts trouble with their peaceful eyes.

## XVIII

### THE ESCAPE

DESTINY drives a crooked plough  
And sows a careless seed ;  
Now through a heart she cuts, and now  
She helps a helpless need.

To-night from London's roaring sea  
She brings a girl and boy ;  
For two hearts used to misery,  
Opens a door of joy.

Wandering from hateful homes they came,  
Till by this fate they meet.  
Then out of ashes springs a flame ;  
Suddenly life is sweet.

Together, where the city ends,  
And looks on Thames's stream,  
That under Surrey willows bends  
And floats into a dream,

Softly in one another's ear  
They murmur childish speech ;  
Love that is deeper and more dear  
For words it cannot reach.



## THE ESCAPE

Above them the June night is still :  
Only with sighs half-heard  
Dark leaves above them flutter and thrill,  
As with their longing stirred ;

And by the old brick wall below  
Rustling, the river glides ;  
Like their full hearts, that deeply glow,  
Is the swell of his full tides.

To the farther shore the girl's pale brow  
Turns with desiring eyes :  
"Annie, what is it you're wishing now?"  
She lifts her head and sighs.

"Willie, how peaceful 'tis and soft  
Across the water! See,  
The trees are sleeping, and stars aloft  
Beckon to you and me.

I think it must be good to walk  
In the fields, and have no care ;  
With trees and not with men to talk.  
O, Willie, take me there!"

Now hand in hand up to the Night  
They gaze ; and she looks down  
With large mild eyes of grave delight,  
The mother they have not known.

## THE ESCAPE

Older than sorrow she appears,  
Yet than themselves more young;  
She understood their childish tears,  
Knew how their love was sprung.

The simple perfume of the grass  
Comes to them like a call.  
Obeying in a dream they pass  
Along the old brick wall;

By flickering lamp and shadowy door,  
Across the muddy creek,  
Warm with their joy to the heart's core,  
With joy afraid to speak.

At last the open road they gain,  
And by the Bridge, that looms  
With giant arch and sloping chain  
Over the river's glooms,

They pause: above, the northern skies  
Are pale with a furnace light.  
London with upcast, sleepless eyes  
Possesses the brief night.

The wind flaps in the lamp; and hark!  
A noise of wheels, that come  
At drowsy pace; along the dark  
A waggon lumbers home.

## THE ESCAPE

Slow-footed, with a weary ease,  
The patient horses step;  
The rein relaxed upon his knees,  
The waggoner nods asleep.

“Annie, it goes the country way,  
’Tis meant for me and you:  
It goes to fields, and trees, and hay,  
Come, it shall take us too!”

He lifts her in his arms, as past  
The great wheels groaning ride,  
And on the straw he sets her fast,  
And lightly climbs beside.

The waggoner nods his drowsy head,  
He hears no sound: awhile  
Softly they listen in sweet dread,  
Then to each other smile.

Odours of dimly flowering June,  
The starry stillness deep,  
Possess their wondering spirits; soon,  
Like children tired, they sleep.

The waggon creaks, the horses plod  
By hedges clearer seen,  
Down the familiar dusty road,  
And past a village green.

## THE ESCAPE

The morning star shines in the pond :  
A cock crows loud, and bright  
The dawn springs in the sky beyond ;  
The birds applaud the light.

But on into the summer morn  
Beneath the gazing East,  
The sleepers move, serenely borne :  
The world for them has ceased.

## XIX

### MIDSUMMER NOON

AT her window gazes over the elms  
A girl; she looks on the branching green;  
But her eyes possess unfathomed realms,  
Her young hand holds her dreaming chin.

Drifted, the dazzling clouds ascend  
In indolent order, vast and slow,  
The great blue; softly their shadows send  
A clearness up from the wall below.

An old man houseless, leaning alone  
By the tree-girt fountain, only heeds  
The fall of the spray in the shine of the sun,  
And nothing possessing, nothing needs.

The square is heavy with silent bloom;  
The tardy wheels uncertain creep.  
Above in a narrow sunlit room,  
The widower watches his child asleep.

## XX

## ELEONORA DUSE AS MAGDA

THE theatre is still, and Duse speaks.  
What charm possesses all,  
And what a bloom let fall  
On parted lips, and eyes, and flushing cheeks!  
The flattering whisper and the trivial word  
No longer heard,  
The hearts of women listen, deeply stirred.  
For now to each those quivering accents seem  
A secret telling for her ear alone:  
The child sits wondering in a world foreknown,  
And the old nod their heads with springing tear,  
Confirming true that acted dream.  
And the soul of each to itself revealed  
Feels to the voice a voice reply,  
With a leaping wonder, a joy, a fear,  
It is I, it is I!  
But O what radiant mirror is this that dazzles me,  
That my dead rapture holds,  
That all my joy unfolds,  
That sets my longing free,  
My sighs renumbers, my old hope renews?  
I have lived in a sleep, I have tasted alien bread,

## ELEONORA DUSE AS MAGDA

I have spoken the speech, and worn the robes of  
the dead;

I have buried my heart away, and none believed.

But now, speak on, and my bonds untie:

At last, it is I, it is I!

## XXI

### THE CONVICT

By the warm road-side, where chestnut and thorn  
The brightness shaded, supine, at ease,  
A felon, freed that morn,  
Lay idle, and wondered, gazing up through the  
trees.

O strange no more to be one of a band  
Numbered and known; to lose the measure  
Of day divided and planned:  
To think for the morrow, to choose work or  
pleasure.

His ear the jostling roar of the street  
Amazed: he felt the crowd like a load;  
And welcomed, refuge sweet,  
Deserted suburb and silent shady road.

For now, with his hands habitual stones  
Of the pavement he touched: close to the wall  
He nestled, and felt to his bones  
The warmth, and the shadow cool on his fore-  
head fall.



## THE CONVICT

And catching a leaf from the chestnut strayed,  
He held it, glowing green in the light,  
Transparent, with veins inlaid;  
And thrust the world and its vastness away from  
sight.

Children from school, as they passed him, eyed  
His shorn temples, and whispering turned  
To mock him: he on his side,  
Abstracted, his limbs disposed to a slumber earned.

A grave citizen, homeward bound,  
Perceived him, as negligent still he lay,  
And swerved askance, and frowned,  
And crossed to the opposite pavement, and went  
his way.

But warming him shone the indifferent noon;  
And chestnut and thorn on his sleeping head  
In the careless glory of June  
Scattered their delicate blossom of white and red.

## XXII

### MARTHA

A WOMAN sat, with roses red  
Upon her lap before her spread,  
On that high bridge whose parapet  
Wide over turbulent Thames is set,  
Between the dome's far glittering crest  
And those famed towers that throng the west.  
Neglectful of the summer air  
That on her pale brow stirred the hair,  
She sat with fond and troubled look,  
And in her hand the roses shook.  
Shy to her lips a bloom she laid,  
Then shrank as suddenly afraid:  
For from the breathing crimson leaf  
The sweetness came to her like grief.  
Dropping her hands, her eyes she raised,  
And on the hurrying passers gazed.  
Two children, loitering along  
Amid that swift and busy throng,  
Their arms about each other's shoulder,  
The younger clinging to the older,  
Stopped, with their faces backward turned  
To her: her heart within her yearned.  
They were so young! She looked away:  
O, the whole earth was young to-day!

## MARTHA

The whole wide earth was laughing fair ;  
The flashing river, the soft air,  
The horses proud, the voices clear  
Of young men, frequent cry and cheer,  
All these were beautiful and free,  
Each with its joy : Alas, but she !  
She started up, and bowed her head,  
And, gathering her roses, fled.

Through dim, uncounted, silent days,  
She had trod deep-secluded ways ;  
'Mid the fierce throng of jostling lives,  
Whom unrelenting hunger drives  
Close to the wall, had stolen by,  
Yet could not shun calamity.  
Her painful thrift, her patient face,  
Could not the world-old debt erase ;  
Nor gentle lips, nor feet that glide,  
Persuade the sudden blow aside.  
This morn, when she arose, her store,  
Trusted to others, was no more.  
No more avail her years of care.  
She must her bosom frail prepare,  
Exposed in her defenceless age,  
Against the world and fortune's rage.  
For bread, for bread, what must be done ?  
She stole forth in the morning sun.  
I will sell flowers, she thought : this way  
Seemed gentler to her first dismay.  
Soon to the great flower-market, fair

## MARTHA

With watered leaves and scented air,  
She came: her seeking, timorous gaze  
Wandered about her in amaze.  
The arches hummed with cheerful sound;  
Buyers and sellers thronged around;  
Lilies in virgin slumber stirred  
Hardly, the gold dust brightly blurred  
Upon their rich illumined snow,  
As the soft breezes come and go.  
From her smooth sheath, with ardent wings,  
Purple and gold, the iris springs;  
Deep-umbered wall-flowers, dusk between  
The radiance and the odour keen  
Of jonquils, this sad woman's eyes  
And her o'erclouded soul surprise.  
But most the wine-red roses, deep  
In sunshine lying, warm asleep,  
Breathing perfume, drinking light  
Into their inmost bosoms bright,  
Seeming fathomlessly to unfold  
A treasure of more price than gold.  
Martha, o'ercome by wonder new,  
Into her heart the crimson drew;  
The colour burning on her cheek,  
She stood, in strange emotion weak.  
But she must buy. Her choice was made:  
Red rose upon red rose she laid,  
Lingering, then hastened out, with eyes  
Bright, and her hands about the prize,  
And quickened thought that nowhere aims.

## MARTHA

Soon, pausing above glittering Thames,  
She spreads the flowers upon her knees.  
Vast, many-windowed palaces  
Before her raised their scornful height  
And haughtily struck back the light.  
She scarcely marked them, only bent  
Her fond gaze on the flowers, intent  
To bind them in gay bunches, drest  
So to allure the spoiler best.  
But now, as her caressing hand  
Each odorous fresh nosegay planned,  
A new grief smote her to the heart:  
Must she from her sweet treasure part?  
They seemed of her own blood. O no,  
I cannot shame my roses so:  
I will get bread some other way.  
So she shut out all thought. The day  
Was radiant; and her soul, surprised  
To beauty, and the unsurmised  
Sweetness of life, itself reproved  
That had so little felt and loved!  
O now to love, if even a flower,  
To taste the sweet sun for an hour,  
Was better than the struggle vain,  
The dull, unprofitable pain,  
To find her useless body bread.  
Stricken with grievous joy, she fled.

She fled, but soon her pace grew faint.  
She paused awhile, and easier went.

## MARTHA

Often, in spirits wrought, despair,  
Not less than joy the end of care,  
A lightness feigns: for all is done,  
And certainty at last begun.  
Martha, with impulse fresh recoiled  
From empty years, forlorn and soiled,  
Trembled to feel the radiant breeze  
Blowing from unknown living seas,  
And, rising eager from long fast,  
Drank in the wine of life at last.  
Now, as some lovely face went by,  
She noted it with yearning eye;  
She joyed in the exultant course  
Of horses, and their rushing force.

At last, long wandering, she drew near  
Her home; then fell on her a fear,  
A shadow from the coming Hours.  
By chance a hawker, crying flowers,  
His barrow pushed along the street,  
And the dull air with scent was sweet.  
As on her threshold Martha stood,  
A sudden thought surprised her blood.  
Quickly she entered, and the stair  
Ascended: first with gentle care  
Cooled her tired roses: then a box  
Of little hoardings she unlocks,  
And brings her silver to the door  
And buys till she can buy no more.  
Laden she enters: the drear room

## MARTHA

Glows strangely; the transfigured gloom  
Flows over, prodigal in bloom.  
Her lonely supper now she spread;  
But with her eyes she banqueted.  
Over the roofs in solemn flame  
The strong beam of the sunset came,  
And from the floor striking a glow  
Burned back upon the wall; and lo!  
How deep, in double splendour dyed,  
Blushed the red roses glorified!  
When darkness dimmed them, Martha sighed.  
Yet still about the room she went  
Touching them, and the subtle scent  
Wandered into her soul, and brought  
All memories, yet stifled thought.  
As in her bed she lay, the flowers  
Haunted her through the midnight hours:  
'Twixt her shut lids the colours crept;  
But wearied out, at last she slept.

Next morning she awoke in dread.  
O mad, O sinful me! she said,  
What have I done? how shall this end  
For me? Alas, I have no friend.  
She strove to rise; but in her brain  
A drowsy magic worked like pain.  
She sank back in a weak amaze  
Upon the pillow: then her gaze  
Fell on the roses; she looked round,  
And in the spell again was bound.

## MARTHA

The deep-hued blossoms standing by  
With serious beauty awed her eye;  
Upward, inscrutable, they flamed:  
Of that mean fear she was ashamed.  
All day their fragrance in the sun  
Possessed her spirit: one by one,  
She pondered o'er them, dozing still  
And waking half against her will.  
Her body hungered, but her soul  
Was feasting. Gradually stole  
The evening shadow on her bed;  
She could no longer lift her head,  
Deep on her brain the flowers had wrought;  
Now in the dim twilight her thought  
Put trembling on a strange attire,  
And blossomed in fantastic fire.  
She stretched her hand out in the gloom:  
It touched upon a living bloom.  
Thither she turned; the deep perfume  
O'ercame her; nearer and more near,  
And now her joy is in her fear,  
The lily hangs, the rose inclines,  
With incense that her soul entwines,  
Her inmost soul that dares not stir.  
The gentle flowers have need of her.  
Unpitying is their rich desire—  
Her breath, her being they require.  
O, she must yield! She sinks far down,  
Conquered, listless, happy, down  
Under wells of darkness, deep



## MARTHA

Into labyrinths of sleep,  
Perishing in sweetness dumb,  
By the close enfolding bloom  
To a sighing phantom kissed,  
Like a water into mist  
Melting, and extinguished quite  
In unfathomed odorous night.

At last, the brief stars paling, dawn  
Breathed from distant stream and lawn.  
The earliest bird with chirrup low  
Called his mates; softly and slow  
The flowers their languid petals part,  
And open to the fragrant heart.  
And now the first fresh beam returned;  
Bright through the lily's edge it burned  
And filled the purple rose with fire,  
And brightened all their green attire,  
And woke a shadow on the wall.

But Martha slept, nor stirred at all.

## XXIII

### AUGUST

IN drooping leaves of the plane  
Hangs blue the early heat ;  
Stirless, a delicate shade  
Sleeps on the parching street.

I wander this listless morning  
By the banks of the dazzling river ;  
On the hot stones lean, where toward me  
Lights from the water quiver.

And clasping hands upon eyes,  
I plunge my thought in a dream  
Of days when the sharp air stung  
And the ice crushed cold in the stream ;

Vainly! on body and mind  
Has the tyrant sun his will:  
And to me, on the hot stone leaning,  
The city is faint and still,

Is faint as listening sands,  
Where, awed by the heavy calm  
Of the desert heaven, listens,  
For ever alone, the palm.

## XXIV

### THE FIRE

WITH beckoning fingers bright  
In heaven uplifted, from the darkness wakes,  
Upon a sudden, radiant Fire,  
And out of slumber shakes  
Her wild hair to the night;  
Bewitching all to run with hurried feet,  
And stand, and gaze upon her beauty dire.

For her the shrinking gloom  
Yields, and a place prepares;  
An ample scene and a majestic room:  
Slowly the river bares  
His bank; above, in endless tier,  
Glittering out of the night the windows come  
To that bright summons; and at last appear,  
Hovering, enkindled, and unearthly clear,  
Steeple, and tower, and the suspended dome.

But whence are these that haste  
So rapt? What throngs along the street that  
press,

## THE FIRE

Raised by enchantment from the midnight  
waste

That even now was sleeping echoless?

Men without number, lured from near and far  
As by a world-portending star!

Lo, on the bright bank without interval  
Faces in murmuring line,

With earnest eyes that shine,

Across the stream gaze ever; on the wall

Faces; and dense along the bridge's side

Uncounted faces; softly the wheels glide

Approaching, lest they break the burning hush

Of all that multitude aflush

With secret strange desire.

Warm in the great light, as themselves afire,

Thousands are gazing, and all silently!

How to the throbbing glare their hearts reply,

As tossing upward a dim-sparkled plume,

The beautiful swift Fury scares the sky.

The stars look changed on high,

And red the steeples waver from the gloom.

Distantly clear over the water swells

The roar: the iron stanchions dribble bright,

And faltering with strong quiver to its fall,

Drops, slowly rushing, the great outer wall.

From lip to lip a wondering murmur goes,

As crouching a dark moment o'er its prey,

Swiftly again upheaps

The wild flame, and exulting madly glows;

The city burns in an enchanted day.

## THE FIRE

Still the great throng impassioned silence keeps,  
Like an adoring host in ecstasy.  
Did ever vision of the opened sky  
Entrance more deeply, or did ever voice  
Of a just wrath more terribly rejoice?  
The houseless beggar gazing has forgot  
His hunger; happy lovers' hands relax;  
They look no more into each others' eyes.  
Wrapt in its mother's shawl  
The fretting child no longer cries.  
And that soul-piercing flame  
Melts out like wax  
The prosperous schemer's busy schemes:  
The reveller like a visionary gleams.  
An aged wandering pair lift up their heads  
Out of old memories; to each, to all,  
Time and the strong world are no more the  
    same,  
But threatened, perishable, trembling, brief,  
Even as themselves, an instant might destroy,  
With all the builded weight of years and grief,  
All that old hope and pleasant usage dear.  
Glories and dooms before their eyes appear;  
Upon their faces joy,  
Within their bosoms fear!

Is it that even now  
In all, O radiant Desolation, thou  
Far off prefigurest  
To each obscurely wounded breast

## THE FIRE

The dream of what shall be?  
And in their hearts they see  
Rushing in ardent ruin out of sight  
With all her splendour, with her streaming robe  
Of seas, and her pale peoples, the vast globe  
A sullen ember crumble into night!

## XXV

### TO A DERELICT

O TRAVELLED far beyond unhappiness  
Into a dreadful peace!  
Why tarriest thou here? The street is bright  
With noon; the music of the tidal sound  
Of London fills the trembling air with power  
Flowing and freed around;  
No corner but is stirred  
With motion and with voices mingling heard,  
That every hour  
Bring thousand faces trooping into light  
Past thee. O hide thyself beneath the ground!  
Trouble not our sunshine longer, lest we see  
Too clearly inscribed on thee  
All that we fear to be.

What dost thou with the sun?  
Long since thy race was run.  
What spectral task employs  
Thy hands? The very boys  
That mocked thee, mock no more; they pass  
thee by,  
Like a dumb stone that cannot make reply.  
Yet, even as a stone  
Will from the turbulent sea

## TO A DERELICT

Take voice and motion not its own,  
Words on thy lips mechanically stray  
With echoes and with gleams that fade and come  
Unrecognized, unknown.  
And as from some extinguished star  
The orphan ray  
Still vainly travels its eternal way,  
A light of meaning flickers from afar  
From what long since was dumb.  
Still at the accustomed place  
Appears thy ruined face;  
And in thy niche all the resounding day,  
'Mid busy voices haunting motionless  
Thou standest; and to every loitering eye  
Resign'st thy history.  
Alas! thou also, thou that art so cold,  
Thou also once wert young;  
And once didst hang upon thy mother's breast  
And laugh upon thy father's knee.  
But now thy flesh is nearer to the mould  
Than the light grass,—and still thou lingerest!  
Woe to thee now, because thou chorest ill,  
Because each hour thou didst resign  
A little more of thy slow-ebbing will,  
And to the invading silence didst assent;  
Because to Life saying for ever Nay,  
To Death thou saidest Yea,  
Who leaves thee now engraven with defeat  
In this triumphal street,  
With all that was and is no longer thine



## TO A DERELICT

Yielded and spent  
At what a priceless cost,  
O face of many battles, and all lost!

Now all thy dues paid, Death possesses thee;  
But too secure  
To occupy his easy kingdom, spares  
To enforce his title; cruelly forbears,  
And suffers thee to languish in thy lot,  
In this most woeful, that thou weepst not.  
So in some street  
Stirred with the rushing feet  
Of life that glitters and that thunders past,  
An aged house, broken and doomed at last,  
Ere yet it vanish quite,  
Abandons helpless to the light  
Spoiled sanctuaries, filled with emptiness,  
Where late the weary harboured, and young fears  
Were cradled into peace,  
And sacred kisses kissed, and private tears  
Were dried, and true hearts hid their close delight.  
But now the fires are ashes, all is bare,  
The torn, gay paper flutters old,  
And a phantasmal stair  
Climbs into floorless chambers, and hearths cold.

XXVI

TRAFALGAR SQUARE

SLOWLY the dawn a magic paleness drew  
From windows dim; the Pillar high in air  
Over dark statues and dumb fountains, threw  
A shadow on the solitary square.

They that all night, dozing disquieted,  
Huddled together on the benches cold,  
Now shrank apart, distrustful and unfed,  
And by the growing radiance unconsoled.

Then one, a woman, silently arose,  
And came to the broad fountain, brimming cool,  
And over the stone margin leaning close,  
Dipped hands and bathed her forehead in the pool.

Now as the fresh drops ran upon her brow  
And her hands knotted up her hair, the ways  
Of old lost mornings came to her, and how  
Into her mirror she would smile and gaze.

## TRAFALGAR SQUARE

Then she was troubled; and looked down once  
more  
Into the glimmering water; and she seemed  
The very depth of darkness to explore,  
If it might yield all that she feared and dreamed.

But that kind clouding mirror answered her  
With a soft answer; liquid mysteries  
Of shadow, with a pale breeze just astir,  
Yielded only the brightness of her eyes.

It was herself; but O what magic wrought  
A presage round her, tender and obscure!  
The water without stain refused her not:  
In that deep vision she rejoined the pure.

The dawn stole on; and from its buried place  
Rose in her bosom the sweet strength of youth;  
She, the rejected, had no more disgrace:  
Her opening heart drew in a different truth.

She that had come past her last hope, and found  
Nothing beyond, and had shed no more tears,  
But closing with dull ashes her first wound,  
Had trodden into the daily dust all fears:

She now began to wonder and to thrill  
Upon a new horizon: and the pain  
Of hope began to quicken and to fill  
The world with strangeness and desire again.

## TRAFALGAR SQUARE

O then I am not come quite to the end,  
She murmured, and life holds more than I knew.  
Somewhere by seeking I may find a friend  
Perhaps, and something in this world be true.

Alone in this bright battle, whose fierce din  
Even now awakes round her defenceless lot,  
Without home, friend, comfort or peace within,  
The very stones might weep her. She weeps not:

But as a plant, that under parching drouth  
Thirsted and drooped and daily heavier grew,  
Rises afresh to the soft showering south,  
She lifts her forehead to the sun anew.

And in her spirit a still fountain springs  
Deeper than hunger, faith crying for life,  
That to her eyes an inward clearness brings,  
And to her heart courage for any strife.

## XXVII

### THE REFORMER

#### HYDE PARK

AUGUST from a vault of hollow brass  
Steep upon the sullen city glares.  
Yellower burns the sick and parching grass,  
Shivering in the breath of furnace airs.

Prone upon their pale, outwearied brows  
Miserable forms lie heavily,  
Cumbering the earth; untimely boughs  
Fallen from this world-o'ershadowing tree,

London, that with every buried sun  
Shakes from her strong life a thousand lives,  
Feeds her heart with blood of hearts undone;  
Nourished with a million sorrows, thrives.

Hither the Reformer comes; a flame  
Burns within his dark, enthusiast gaze.  
Still he thirsts to show mankind their shame,  
Lift and drag them from their sinful ways.

## THE REFORMER

Now amid the prostrate scattered throng  
Standing, he uplifts his earnest cry :  
“Wake, awake, rise up from lust and wrong,  
Quickly seek God’s mercy ere you die !

“Thunder on your hesitation hangs.  
God prepares your fearful punishment.  
Flee, while yet ’tis time, those endless pangs,  
Hearken, wretched sinners, and repent.”

Scarce the motion of a listless arm,  
Scarce the uneasy lifting of a head,  
Answers that stern trumpet of alarm.—  
Still he sounds his vehement note of dread.

Hand in hand three children solemn-eyed  
Wonder up into his face, and pass,  
Often turning backward, o’er the wide  
Hueless desert of the hazy grass.

Fierce the lava-torrent of his speech  
Pours on those dejected souls around ;  
Yet his words no single bosom reach,  
Wither and fall idle on the ground.

Now at last he falters ; his own thought,  
His own voice, is strange and far to him.  
The sun stares his meaning into naught ;  
In the stillness all his fire is dim.

## THE REFORMER

From those miserable forms unstirred  
Now a mute imploring cry he hears,  
Like a stricken creature's, without word;  
O what vain voice sounds upon our ears!

Powerless are thy terrors to appal.  
Welcome even, so we feel the less  
Heavy on our hearts and over all  
This intolerable emptiness!

Empty is the earth for us, the skies  
Empty; only lives the brazen sun.  
Empty are our hearts; and if we rise,  
There is nothing to be sought nor won.

If upon our silence thou intrude,  
Speak a speech that we may understand!  
Leave us to endure our solitude,  
Or reach out to us a brother's hand.

Join us to this life that round us teems;  
Let us breathe again that common breath!  
Bring us sorrow, labour, terrors, dreams,  
Madness; but deliver us from death!

## XXVIII

### WHITECHAPEL HIGH ROAD

LUSTY life her river pours  
Along a road of shining shores.  
The moon of August beams  
Mild as upon her harvest slopes; but here  
From man's full-breath'd abounding earth  
Exiled she walks, as one of alien birth,  
The pale, neglected foster-mother of dreams.  
For windows with resplendent stores  
Along the pavement dazzle and outstare  
The booths that front them; there,  
To the throng which loiters by in laughing  
streams  
Babble the criers: and 'mid eager sounds  
The flaming torches toss to the wind their hair,  
And ruddy in trembling waves the light  
Flushes cheeks of wondering boys  
Assembled, their lips parted and eyes bright,  
As the medicine-seller his magic herb expounds,  
Or some old man displays his painted toys.  
Deaf with a vacant stillness of the tomb,  
At intervals a road deserted gapes,  
Where night shrinks back into her proper gloom,



## WHITECHAPEL HIGH ROAD

Frighted by boisterous flare  
Of the flame, that now through a cluster of  
    green grapes  
Shines wanly, or on striped apple and smooth  
    pear  
Flits blushing; now on rug or carpet spread  
In view of the merry buyers, the rude dyes  
Re-crimsons, or an antic shadow throws  
Over the chestnut brazier's glowing eyes;  
And now the sleeping head  
Of a gipsy child in his dim corner shows,  
Huddled against a canvas wall, his bed  
An ancient sack: nor torch, nor hundred cries  
Awake him from his sweet profound repose.

But thou, divine moon, with thine equal beam  
Dispensing patience, stealest unawares  
The thoughts of many that pass sorrowful on  
Else undiverted, amid the crowd alone:  
Embroiderest with beauties the worn theme  
Of trouble; to a fancied harbour calm  
Steerest the widow's ship of heavy cares;  
And on light spirits of lovers, radiant grown,  
Dropest an unimaginable balm.  
Yet me to-night thy peace rejoices less  
Than this warm human scene, that of rude earth  
Pleasantly savours, nor dissembles mirth,  
Nor grief nor passion: sweet to me this press  
Of life unnumbered, where if hard distress  
Be tyrant, hunger is not fed

## WHITECHAPEL HIGH ROAD

Nor misery pensioned with the ill-tasting bread  
Of pity; but such help as earth ordains  
Betwixt her creatures, bound in common pains,  
One from another, without prayer, obtains.

XXIX

IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

SHAFTS of light, that poured from the August  
sun,  
Glowed on long red walls of the gallery cool;  
Fell upon monstrous visions of ages gone,  
Still, smiling Sphinx, winged and bearded Bull.

With burnished breast of ebon marble, queen  
And king regarded full, from a tranquil brain  
Enthroned together, conquered Time; serene  
In spite of wisdom, and older than ancient pain.

Hither a poor woman, with sad eyes, came,  
And vacantly looked around. The faces vast,  
Their strange motionless features, touched with  
flame,  
Awed her: in humble wonder she hurried past;

And shyly beneath a sombre monument sought  
Obscurity; into the darkest shade she crept  
And rested: soon, diverted awhile, her thought  
Returned to its own trouble. At last she slept.

## IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Not long sweet sleep alone her spirit possest. -  
A dream seized her: a solemn and strange  
dream.

For far from home in an unknown land, opprest  
By burning sun, in the noon's terrible beam

She wandered; around her out of the plain arose  
Immense Forms, that high above her stared.  
Calm they seemed, and used to human woes;  
Silent they heard her sorrow, with ears prepared.

Now like a bird, flitting with anxious wings,  
Imprisoned within some vast cathedral's aisles,  
Hither and thither she flutters: to each she  
brings  
Her prayer, and is answered only with grave  
smiles.

Indescribably troubled, "Crush me," she cries,  
"Speak, speak, or crush me!" The lips are dumb.  
—She woke, no longer in shadow, the sun on  
her eyes,  
And sighed, and arose, and returned to her  
empty home.

XXX

THE THRESHOLD

AN ODE

I WALKED beside full-flooding Thames to-night  
Westward; upon my face the sunset fell:  
The hour, the spacious evening, pleased me well.  
Buoyant the air breathed after rain, and kind  
To senses flattered with soft sound and light  
Of merry waves that leapt against the wind,  
Where, broadly heaving barge and boat at rest,  
The River came at flood; from golden skies  
Issuing through arches, black upon the West,  
To flame before the sunset's mysteries.

Far off to-night as a remembered dream  
That different Thames, familiar as a friend,  
That youthful Thames, to whom his willows bend  
With private whisper; where my boat would  
    come,  
Heaped with fresh flowers, and down the cool  
    smooth stream  
Follow his green banks through the twilight home.  
Far from these paven shores, these haughty towers,  
Where wave and beam glorying together run,

## THE THRESHOLD

As though they would disown those cradling  
    bowers,  
And gushed immediate from the molten sun.

Dazzled I turn; and lo, the solemn East  
Before me comes. Soft to my eyes, yet bright,  
London her vastness stretches in hushed light  
Murmuring; wharf and terrace curve afar  
Past bridge and steeple, thronging, great with  
    least,  
To Paul's high cross that sparkles like a star.  
The distant windows glitter; and high o'er them,  
Clouds unapproachable, illumined snows,  
Tinged with calm fire that blushes like a gem,  
As though themselves burned inwardly, repose.

All things, methought, that inward glory shared,  
A radiant strangeness: nothing I beheld  
But spoke in a new tongue to me, or spelled  
New meanings; and within me a deep sense  
Of portals opening, of an hour prepared,  
Prophesied; and a light, transported thence,  
Of expectation on me also came.  
Glowing, the city waits what shall arrive:  
The steep clouds smoulder as to sudden flame  
They would burst forth, and the wave leaps alive.

Immediately stole over me the thought  
Of this age ending; painful and oppressed,  
Its cry, entreating still-rejected rest,

## THE THRESHOLD

Echoed behind me. But I seemed to stand  
Beyond; and over the near threshold brought  
Of days to be, the air blew strong and bland.  
I listened; and a voice, wherein bore part  
Cloud, light, and wind, and water, thus began  
Aërial tones; a voice from the deep heart  
Of all things speaking to the heart of man.

Say, troubled one, what sorrow is it keeps  
Thy spirit? Because thy latest dream is shed,  
Is the root sapped, and the strong branches dead?  
Forget'st thou that thy generations have  
Their seasons, and for them her due term sleeps  
Spring, with her buds, dreaming in Autumn's  
grave?

Because 'twas Autumn with thee, thou sit'st  
mute,  
To the fall of the leaf consenting: Yet thine  
eyes

Cast round thee, and consider what fair fruit  
The full seeds bear in charge! Wake, and arise!

Wake, and for blither energy remit  
This tedious questing in the inscrutable past,  
This pondering the before and after vast.  
O couldst thou take, like us, Time's quiet bloom,  
On life alone expend thy freshened wit,  
The burden and the joy alone resume!  
The mountains groan not that the streams devour

## THE THRESHOLD

With thievish tongue their ancient high estate,  
Nor of her pining leaf complains the flower;  
But thou enjoy'st not nor reject'st thy fate.

Pitying thee, the Powers that on thee cast  
Thy destiny, 'mid labour solace sent.  
For veiled they keep that infinite ascent  
Of years, and by degrees the pathway show  
Up which thou mountest, deeming still the last  
Step won, and numbered all the stones of woe.  
And easily triumphant thou lean'st forth  
To grasp the final palm; when that eludes,  
As easily dejected: placid Earth  
Remains, a mirror for thy hundred moods.

Dream-builder, for whose dreams thy lips invent  
Names of sweet sound, freedom and peace and  
truth,  
Upon the bright fermenting mists of youth  
Projecting a foredoomed reality:  
Happy, if gross joys could thy brain content,  
Or could thy faith match thy credulity;  
Ever inweaving Earth's plain warp with thread  
Of thy deep wishes, thine own heart's strong hue,  
The mind thy prison, thought thy narrow bed,  
With truth, with freedom what hast thou to do?

O yet, I answered, not in vain desire  
Spurs us to gaze into the infinity,  
To dip our hands in that wide whispering sea.



## THE THRESHOLD

How shall one flower the whole wood's voices  
tell,  
Or one small sphere interpret that full choir  
Of orb with orb, music ineffable  
From all worlds mingled? Yet since our best joy  
Not in possession but beyond us lies,  
Our hearts at last, weary of earth's annoy,  
Only that far-off music satisfies.

Name beyond names, Heart of the Eternal Life,  
Whom our faint thought hardly at times con-  
ceives,  
Who hear'st but as the oak his fluttered leaves  
The cry of parting spirits; who in the pang  
For children born rejoicest; from whose strife  
And travail issuing the bright worlds outsprang;  
If the wide thought of thee my childish grief  
Ever effaced, accept my manhood's vow!  
O sweet and insupportable, O chief  
And first and last of all loves, hear me now!

Me, whom this living vastness once appalled,  
And this uproar disheartened and oppressed,  
Now larger thoughts enfranchise, with sweet zest  
Nourish, and this immensity sustains;  
Buoyed as a swimmer upon ocean, called  
From time to the eternal, my due pains  
Accepting, in thy bosom I repose,  
Of joys and griefs together make my bed,

## THE THRESHOLD

In longing to set sure against all foes  
My spirit freed, and with thy spirit wed.

Thou, thou remainest ever in lovely power  
Triumphant, whom beginning never knew;  
'Tis we alone that our own strength undo,  
'Tis we alone that, to thy ardour lame,  
Often defeated, miserably deflower  
The joy thou gavest, quench the imparted flame,  
And native sweet sourly to ashes turn.  
O help, inspire! Us with thyself endow!  
Through our brief actions let thy greatness burn,  
As through the clouds the light is burning now!

For me, since thou this hour to see thee whole  
Vouchsafest, no more shall my heart deny  
That thou proceed'st, because I fail and cry.  
Henceforth will I endure to walk right on  
Nor my bliss too much ponder, nor my dole.  
And since dear peace fortifies faith alone,  
I trust thee, and not loth resign my heart,  
Nor though thou shouldst betray me, wound and  
    rend,  
Would my course alter, that the better part  
Have chosen, enduring to the unknown end.

So inwardly my lifted spirit sang.  
And lo, that solemn joy to authorize,  
With answering bloom before my lifted eyes

## THE THRESHOLD

The clouds moved softly; the far western fires  
A moment o'er the steeples paused and sprang.  
Now on the eye the fading light expires.  
But 'tis to me as if Earth cast off Day,  
Assuming her own glory, and her flight  
Unwearied urging on the eternal way,  
Already glowed among the lamps of Night.

## XXXI

### THE ROAD MENDERS

How solitary gleams the lamplit street  
Waiting the far-off morn!  
How softly from the unresting city blows  
The murmur borne  
Down this deserted way!  
Dim loiterers pass home with stealthy feet.  
Now only, sudden at their interval,  
The lofty chimes awaken and let fall  
Deep thrills of ordered sound;  
Subsiding echoes gradually drowned  
In a great stillness, that creeps up around,  
And darkly grows  
Profounder over all  
Like a strong frost, hushing a stormy day.

But who is this, that by the brazier red  
Encamped in his rude hut,  
With many a sack about his shoulder spread  
Watches with eyes unshut?  
The burning brazier flushes his old face,  
Illumining the old thoughts in his eyes.  
Surely the Night doth to her secrecies

## THE ROAD MENDERS

Admit him, and the watching stars attune  
To their high patience, who so lightly seems  
To bear the weight of many thousand dreams  
(Dark hosts around him sleeping numberless);  
He surely hath unbuilt all walls of thought  
To reach an air-wide wisdom, past access  
Of us, who labour in the noisy noon,  
The noon that knows him not.

For lo, at last the gloom slowly retreats,  
And swiftly, like an army, comes the Day,  
All bright and loud through the awakened streets  
Sending a cheerful hum.  
And he has stolen away.  
Now, with the morning shining round them, come  
Young men, and strip their coats  
And loose the shirts about their throats,  
And lightly up their ponderous hammers lift,  
Each in his turn descending swift  
With triple strokes that answer and begin  
Duly, and quiver in repeated change,  
Marrying the eager echoes that weave in  
A music clear and strange.  
But pausing soon, each lays his hammer down  
And deeply breathing bares  
His chest, stalwart and brown,  
To the sunny airs.  
Laughing one to another, limber hand  
On limber hip, flushed in a group they stand,  
And now untired renew their ringing toil.

## THE ROAD MENDERS

The sun stands high, and ever a fresh throng  
Comes murmuring; but that eddying turmoil  
Leaves many a loiterer, prosperous or unfed,  
On easy or unhappy ways  
At idle gaze,  
Charmed in the sunshine and the rhythm en-  
thralling,  
As of unwearied Fates, for ever young,  
That on the anvil of necessity  
From measureless desire and quivering fear,  
With musical sure lifting and downfalling  
Of arm and hammer driven perpetually,  
Beat out in obscure span  
The fiery destiny of man.

## XXXII

### NOVEMBER

TOGETHER we laughed and talked in the warm  
lit room :

Out now, alone I come  
Into the street, in the fall of the early night.  
Shadowy skies, with a pale uncertain gloom,  
Hover above the houses dim; but bright  
In wetness mirrored far,  
Retreating lamps outshine the lingering light.  
Hazily blue the air, heavy with dews  
The wind; and before me the cries and the crowd,  
And the sleepless murmur of wheels; not loud,  
For a magical softness all imbrues.  
The softness estranges my sense: I see and I hear,  
But know'tis a vision intangible, shapes that seem.  
All is unreal; the sound of the falling of feet,  
Coming figures, and far-off hum of the street;  
A dream, the gliding hurry, the endless lights,  
Houses and sky, a dream, a dream!

### XXXIII

THE Mother to her brooding breast  
Her shrouded baby closely holds,  
A stationary shadow, drest  
In shadow, falling folds on folds.

With gesture motionless as Night  
She stands; through wavering glare and sound  
Deep pierces like a sombre light  
The full gloom of her gaze profound.



### XXXIV

THE Toy-seller his idle wares  
Carefully ranges, side by side;  
With coveting soft earnest airs  
The children linger, open-eyed.

His haunted soul from far away  
Looks in the lamplight absently:  
They see not him, O happy they!  
He sees not them, O woeful he!

## XXXV

## THE BIRCH TREE

TOUCHED with beauty, I stand still and gaze  
In the autumn twilight. Yellow leaves and brown,  
The grass enriching, gleam, or waver down  
From lime and elm: far-glimmering through the  
haze

The quiet lamps in order twinkle; dumb  
And fair the park lies; faint the city's hum.

And I regret not June's impassioned prime,  
When her deep lilies banqueted the air,  
And this now ruined, then so fragrant lime  
Cooled with clear green the heavy noon's high  
glare;

Nor flushed carnations, breathing hot July;  
Nor April's thrush in the blithest songs of the  
year,

With brown bloom on the elms and dazzling sky;  
So strange a charm there lingers in this austere  
Resigning month, yielding to what must be.  
Yet most, O delicate birch, I envy thee,  
Child among trees! with silvery slender limbs  
And purple sprays of drooping hair. Night dims  
The grass; the great elms darken; no birds sing.  
At last I sigh for the warmth and the fragrance  
flown.

But thou in the leafless twilight shinest alone,  
Awaiting in ignorant trust the certain spring.

## XXXVI

### FOG

MAGICALLY awakened to a strange, brown night  
The streets lie cold. A hush of heavy gloom  
Dulls the noise of the wheels to a murmur dead :  
Near and sudden the passing figures loom ;  
And out of darkness steep on startled sight  
The topless walls in apparition emerge.  
Nothing revealing but their own thin flames,  
The rayless lamps burn faint and bleared and red :  
Link-boys' cries, and the shuffle of horses led,  
Pierce the thick air ; and like a distant dirge,  
Melancholy horns wail from the shrouded Thames.  
Long the blind morning hooded the dumb town ;  
Till lo ! in an instant winds arose, and the air  
Lifted : at once, from a cold and spectral sky  
Appears the sun, and laughs in mockery down  
On groping travellers far from where they deem,  
In un conjectured roads ; the dwindled stream  
Of traffic in slow confusion crawling by :  
The baffled hive of helpless man laid bare.

## XXXVII

### MOTHER OF EXILES

WHAT far-off trouble steals  
In soft-blown drifts of glimmering rain?  
What is it the wind feels,  
What sighing of what old home-seeking pain  
Among the hurried footsteps and the wheels,  
The living low continual roar  
Of night and London? What is it comes near,  
Felt like a blind man's touch along the wall  
Questing, and strange, like fear,  
Lets a lone silence 'mid the turmoil fall,  
Makes the long street seem vaster than before,  
And the tall lamp, above dim passers-by,  
Gleam solitary as on an ocean shore.

Ships on far tracks are stemming through the  
    night;  
South, east and west by foreign stars they steer;  
Another half-world in the sun lies bright;  
The darkness and the wind are here.

And now the rare late footfall scarce is heard,  
But the wind cries along the emptied street.  
In cowering lamp-light flicker the fine drops  
To vanish wildly blurred;

## MOTHER OF EXILES

A hunted sky flies over the housetops.  
Importunate gusts beat  
Shaking the windows, knocking at the doors  
As with phantasmal hands,  
A crying as of spirits from far shores  
And the bright under-lands,  
Seeking one place  
That is to each eternal in the hue  
The light, the shadow of some certain hour,  
One pang-like moment, years cannot efface.  
O infinite remoteness, near and new!  
O corner where friend parted from his friend!  
O door of the first kiss, the last embrace!  
O day when all was possible, O end  
Irrevocable! O dream-feet that pace  
One street, dear to the dead!  
O London stones, that glimmer in the rain,  
With bliss, with pain, have you not also bled?

## XXXVIII

### JOHN WINTER

WHAT ails John Winter, that so oft  
Silent he sits apart?  
The neighbours cast their looks on him;  
But deep he hides his heart.

In Deptford streets the houses small  
Huddle forlorn together.  
Whether the wind blow or be still,  
'Tis soiled and sorry weather.

But over these dim roofs arise  
Tall masts of ocean ships,  
Whenever John Winter looked on them  
The salt blew on his lips.

He cannot pace the street about,  
But they stand before his eyes!  
'The more he shuns them, the more proud  
And beautiful they rise.

He turns his head, but in his ear  
The steady Trade-winds run,  
And in his eye the endless waves  
Ride on into the sun.

## JOHN WINTER

His little boy at evening said,  
Now tell us, Dad, a tale  
Of naked men that shoot with bows,  
Tell of the spouting whale!

He told old tales, his eyes were bright,  
His wife looked up to see  
And smiled on him: but in the midst  
He ended suddenly.

He bade them each good-night, and kissed  
And held them to his breast.  
They wondered and were still, to feel  
Their lips so fondly pressed.

He sat absorbed in silent gloom.  
His wife lifted her head  
From sewing, and stole up to him.  
What ails you, John? she said.

He spoke no word. A silent tear  
Fell softly down her cheek.  
She knelt beside him, and his hand  
Was on her forehead meek.

But even as his tender touch  
Her dumb distress consoled,  
The mighty waves danced in his eyes  
And through the silence rolled.

## JOHN WINTER

There fell a soft November night,  
Restless with gusts that shook  
The chimneys, and beat wildly down  
The flames in the chimney nook.

John Winter lay beside his wife.  
'Twas past the mid of night.  
Softly he rose, and in dead hush  
Stood stealthily upright.

Softly he came where slept his boys,  
And kissed them in their bed.  
One stretched his arms out in his sleep:  
At that he turned his head.

And now he bent above his wife.  
She slept a sleep serene.  
Her patient soul was in the peace  
Of breathing slumber seen.

— At last he kissed one aching kiss,  
Then shrank again in dread,  
And from his own home guiltily  
And like a thief he fled.

But now with darkness and the wind  
He breathes a breath more free,  
And walks with calmer step like one  
Who goes with destiny.



## JOHN WINTER

And see, before him the great masts  
Tower with all their spars  
Black on the dimness, soaring bold  
Among the mazy stars.

In stormy rushings through the air  
Wild scents the darkness filled,  
And with a fierce forgetfulness  
His drinking nostril thrilled.

He hasted with quick feet, he hugged  
The wildness to his breast,  
As one who goes the only way  
To set his heart at rest.

When morning glimmered, a great ship  
Dropt gliding down the shore.  
John Winter coiled the anchor ropes  
Among his mates once more.

XXXIX

SONGS OF THE WORLD UNBORN

SONGS of the world unborn  
Swelling within me, a shoot from the heart of  
    Spring,  
As I walk the ample and teeming street  
'This tranquil and misty morn,  
What is it to me you sing?

My body warm, my brain clear,  
Unreasoning joy possesses my soul complete;  
The keen air mettles my blood,  
And the pavement rings to my feet.

O houses erect and vast, O steeples proud,  
That soar serenely aloof,  
Vistas of railing and roof,  
Dim-seen in the delicate shroud of the frosty air,  
You are built but of shadow and cloud,  
I will come with the wind and blow,  
You shall melt, to be seen no longer, O phantoms  
    fair.

Embattled city, trampler of dreams,  
So long deluding, thou shalt delude no more;

## SONGS OF THE WORLD UNBORN

The trembling heart thou haughtily spurnest,  
But thou from a dream art sprung,  
From a far-off vision of yore,  
To a dream, to a dream returnest.  
Time, the tarrier,  
Time the unshunnable,  
Stealing with patient rivers the mountainous lands,  
Or in turbulent fire upheaving,  
Who shifts for ever the sands,  
Who gently breaks the unbreakable barrier,  
Year upon year into broadening silence weaving,  
Time, O mighty and mightily peopled city,  
Time is busy with thee.  
Behold, the tall tower moulders in air,  
The staunch beam crumbles to earth,  
Pinnacles falter and fall,  
And the immemorial wall  
Melts, as a cloud is melted under the sun.  
Nor these alone, but alas,  
Things of diviner birth,  
Glories of men and women strong and fair,  
They too, alas, perpetually undone!  
As the green apparition of leaves  
Buds out in the smile of May;  
As the red leaf smoulders away,  
That frozen Earth receives;  
In all thy happy, in all thy desolate places,  
They spring, they glide,  
Unnumbered blooming and fading faces!  
O what shall abide?

## SONGS OF THE WORLD UNBORN

Aching desire, mutinous longing,  
Love, the divine rebel, the challenge of all,  
Faith, that the doubters doubted and wept her fall,  
To an empty sepulchre thronging :  
These, the sap of the earth,  
Irresistibly sprung,  
In the blood of heroes running sweet,  
In the dream of the dreamers ever young,  
Supplanting the solid and vast delusions,  
Hearthen the heart of the wronged to endure defeat,  
The forward-gazing eyes of the old sustain,  
Mighty in perishing youth, and in endless birth,  
These remain.





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